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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 000380

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [ELTN](#) [ENRG](#) [EPET](#) [ASEC](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: BUSES STRIKE IN PROTEST OF FUEL COSTS

Classified By: Pol/Econ Officer Erinn Reed for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

**¶11.** (U) On Saturday, March 13, the Buses' Union members went on strike, causing a total disruption of the bus transportation in the capital city of Djibouti. The overwhelming majority of the inhabitants in the capital rely on bus transportation, primarily in the form of 11 or 21 passenger minivans. The strike was made to protest the increase of diesel fuel, which has gone from DJF 71 to DJF 100 (approximately 40 cents to 56 cents) per liter within the last four years. The bus drivers are blaming the government for the high cost of fuel because of the close to 100 percent tax levied on diesel fuel. An additional reason that contributed to the strike is the recent decision by the mayor of Djibouti City to deviate the bus route from the road passing in front of the high school, which was convenient for both buses and students.

**¶12.** (U) Students, who also rely almost wholly on buses, joined the strike because they missed their classes. Some students threw stones at private car owners who refused to give them rides. Others blocked roads by burning tires and other materials. The police responded with tear gas and confrontations with the students. The Government did not make official reports of injuries, but there were light injuries on both sides. The mayor of Djibouti City strongly condemned the strike, indicating that the Buses' Union did not inform the Ministry of Interior in advance, as required by law for protests. The buses returned to work the next day, Sunday, March 14th, while still in negotiations with the Government.

**¶13.** (C) In discussing the strike with Captain Abdoullahi Youssouf of the Djiboutian army, Emboff asked why there were still a few buses running and if those individuals would be alienated by the striking drivers. Youssouf responded that they were already a part of a separate faction and in fact probably had more to do with the strike than the increase in diesel fuel. He went on to explain that certain high ranking members of the Djiboutian security apparatus, specifically the police force, owned a number of the buses used in the route taxi business. These taxis, he explained, were exempt from the constant harassment many bus drivers faced from the police for payment of registration or license or whatever other fine of the day was in vogue. He continued on that these "protected" taxis were also usually uninsured and protected from any liability. These issues, in conjunction with the raise in diesel prices, had driven other drivers to the streets.

**¶15.** (U) COMMENT: Buses charge DJF 40 (23 cents) for one trip. The government fixes this rate because buses are the only means of transportation for most of the inhabitants of Djibouti City. In addition, many people would not be able to afford bus transportation if the rate was increased and would protest. While the general bus strike only lasted one day and the uprising of students was quickly dispersed, the situation made government authorities nervous. The situation could have quickly degenerated into further unrest. If the price of diesel continues to climb, the Government will need to find a lasting solution or face incidents of protest. The strikes are another example of the frustrations that accompany increased competition, rising fuel prices, and inconsistent regulation in Djibouti.  
END COMMENT.

RAGSDALE